

YEC slated Dec. 30-31 at MC

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

The pre-registration deadline for the 2013 Mississippi Baptist Youth Evangelism Challenge (YEC) may have passed, but organizers say that shouldn't stop anyone from attending the annual event on Dec. 30-31 at Mississippi College in Clinton.

"Participants can register at the door of A.E. Wood Coliseum on the Mississippi College campus when they arrive," said Don Lum, YEC organizer and director of evangelism at the sponsoring Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) in Jackson. "That won't be a problem."

The two-day event is open to youth and their chaperones who want to hear the Gospel preached and deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ.

"YEC is a time when Christian students are challenged to make their faith known to fellow students, and to make Christ known to those students as their Lord and Savior," Lum said. "YEC will encourage Christian students and spur them to share their witness and testimony with friends back home."

Featured speakers include Ed Newton and Brock Gill.

Newton is a full-time evangelist from Gotha, Fla. A former college basketball player, Newton's pointed

"YEC will encourage Christian students and spur them to share their witness and testimony with friends back home."

Don Lum

YEC organizer,
director of evangelism at MBCB

message to young people drew a standing room only crowd to the 2013 Mississippi Baptist Youth Night on July 26 in the Mississippi Coliseum in Jackson. More information on Newton can be viewed at ednewton.tv.

Gill is an international evangelist, illusionist, and stunt artist who served as lead investigator for the 2005 Discovery Channel/BBC documentary, *The Miracles of Jesus*. More information on Gill can be viewed at brockgill.com.


Praise through worship will be led by Christian recording artist Bethany Barr Phillips of Tuscaloosa, AL, and her band. A cancer survivor, Phillips has played a number of venues in Mississippi in recent years and provided worship at the

see YEC on p. 10

YOUTH EVANGELISM CHALLENGE

FOCUSED & READY

HEBREWS 12:1-2



DECEMBER 30-31, MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE.
REGISTRATION BEGINS MONDAY, DEC. 30 AT 1:00 PM.
CHALLENGE CONCLUDES AT 11:00 P.M. DEC. 31

Sponsored by the Evangelism Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board
For more information contact us at 1-800-748-1651, ext. 278

Miss. vols in Texas, Okla. for cleanup

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief Task Force volunteers are in Texas and Oklahoma helping clear debris left by a severe winter storm Dec. 7-8 that blanketed the two states with a heavy layer of ice that some observers are saying will go into the record books.

Jim Diddle, director of the Men's Ministry Department at the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) in Jackson and coordinator of the task force, said 10 volunteers are in the Dallas area and 16 volunteers are in Oklahoma.

Oncor, the company that manages electrical power distribution in north Texas, estimated that as many as 500,000 homes were without electricity at the height of the storm. That would represent one of the largest outages in the company's history, the company reported.

"The Dallas volunteers are disaster relief team members

see CLEANUP on p. 11

Taylor to join MBCB Collegiate Ministry Dept.

By Weaver McCracken
Correspondent

Jennie Taylor, a West Point native and recent International Mission Board (IMB) missionary to Bangkok Thailand, will be joining the Collegiate Ministry Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) as associate director, effective January 1.

Taylor is a graduate of Mississippi College in Clinton and New Orleans Seminary, and has served in Thailand with IMB since 2000. During that time she filled various roles, including student mobilization coordinator and general mission annual regional meeting coordinator for the Southeast Asian region.

She has additional experience in university



TAYLOR

administration, serving as director of student activities at Louisiana College in Pineville, La., and assistant dean of students at University of Central Arkansas in Conway.

Her extensive experience working with college students in coordinating larger mission mobilization efforts and executing large events help qualify her for statewide work with church college ministries and Baptist Student Union (BSU) programs statewide.

Taylor's stated ministry goal is, "To challenge and equip students to live missional lives, engaging cultures and impacting the world to make God's ways and salvation known among all people."

As coordinator for statewide summer missions, she brings both experience and passion as she will lead efforts to recruit, screen, and train student summer missions volunteers.

Since 1947, when several state BSU programs from across the South fielded the first summer missions team, a tidal wave of BSU summer missionaries have crossed the globe

for the cause of Christ. Mississippi BSU was among the group sending a student from Blue Mountain College on that first summer missions team. Since that time, Mississippi BSU students have raised more than four million dollars and sent nearly 4,500 students to serve.

During the early years, the numbers of student volunteer numbers were smaller, but in recent decades, students have been volunteering and serving in increasing numbers. While it took 41 years for the first one thousand students to serve, the last one thousand took only eight years (2007-2013). Mississippi BSU summer missionary appointment milestones include:

■ 1947 - first summer missionary from Blue Mountain College served.

■ 1987 - summer missionary number 1,000 served.

■ 1998 - summer missionary number 2,000 served.

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From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS

An abandoned Christian

The incomprehensible nightmare continues for Naghmeh Abedini and her family.

Her husband, American Christian pastor Saeed Abedini, was snatched on June 12, 2013, by Islamic extremist authorities from the site of an orphanage he was helping to build in his native Iran. Convicted in a kangaroo court and sentenced to eight years imprisonment, he has disappeared into the maw of that country's brutal prison system.

Tortured, starved, isolated, and denied critical medical care, he could well be dead by the time this commentary is published. Not surprisingly, the Islamic extremists in charge of Iran don't seem to be cowed by the U.S. government's timid and infrequent references to Saeed's dire situation.

Naghmeh, who has two small children with Saeed, has championed her husband's cause since his abduction in Iran. Unfortunately, her government — our government — has turned its back on Saeed and his family.

Testifying Dec. 12 before a U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Naghmeh said of the Obama administration, "My husband is suffering because he is a Christian. He is suffering because he is an American. Yet, his own government... has abandoned him. Don't we owe it to him as a nation to stand up for his human rights, for his freedom?"

The short answer is yes, on all those counts. The Obama administration apparently doesn't agree.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, an Obama appointee, recently said, "I personally raised the issue with the (Iran) Foreign Minister Zarif when I met him the very first time, and we have not linked it directly to the nuclear issue because we believe that prejudices them and it also prejudices the negotiation."

Listen to the cold, clinical detach-



PAINFUL TESTIMONY — Naghmeh Abedini testified before a U.S. Congress subcommittee on Dec. 12, describing her family's anguish and sense of abandonment by the U.S. government since her husband, American citizen and Christian pastor Saeed Abedini was captured and imprisoned in Iran in June 2012. (BP photo)

ment in the words of White House deputy national security adviser Ben Rhodes in remarks recently broadcast on CNN: "The Iranians make assertions based on their own legal system. We reject those assertions that these individuals have a legal basis for being detained. It shows one thing, which is that we're trying to resolve the nuclear issue, which is of great concern to us, but even as we are doing that, it doesn't lessen our concern about other activities of the Iranian government."

They are talking about the life of an American citizen. They are talking about the life of an American Christian pastor. They don't care. What's one American — one Christian — sacrificed for the advancement of greater issues?

God help us, that we have arrived at this point.

Can it happen at your church?

It seems that mass casualty shootings — active shooter situations in law enforcement terms — have been occurring with alarming frequency.

Yet, such sad incidents are nothing new. One of the earliest recorded was in 1949 when a lone gunman killed 13 people in Camden, N.J. Since that time towns and cities like Jonesboro, Ar.; Littleton, Co.; Fort Hood, Texas; Newtown, Ct.; and Washington, D.C. are but a few of the places where the ugliness of mankind has become apparent.

The law enforcement community as well as fire and rescue services have adapted to meet these threats. Often times however, these incidents end as quickly as they begin. The Federal Bureau of Investigation notes the average active shooter incident lasts less than 12 minutes; 37% last less than five minutes.

Thus, relying solely on local law enforcement to mitigate the situation may not be in your own best interest. Forty-three percent of the time the assailant stops prior to the arrival of police.

Simple measures can keep you, your friends, and your family alive. Consider the following:

Mentally prepare yourself. Unless you have been trained to deal with emergent situations, the simplest of actions may be difficult to accomplish. One moment you may be shopping for a Christmas or birthday gift, when suddenly gunfire erupts. You can't believe what you are seeing and hearing. You want to do something... yet your muscles won't react.

The mind has difficulty accommodating radical change. Certainly someone being shot only feet away, when you are purchasing a gift, could be considered radical change. So, mentally prepare yourself. Take a second and play the "What If" game. Is there a door at the rear of the store with an exit sign over top of it? That sign means the door or the hallway beyond will lead to the outside of the building.

When in doubt, run. Grab the kids and run! Nope, leave the packages behind. They are not worth your life.

It was surprising watching videos of the shooting incident at Los Angeles International Airport on November 1. Passengers were running through the terminal dragging one, sometimes two pieces of luggage behind as they tried to flee. Think about it.



Guest opinion

with Dennis R. Krebs

Is there anything in that Samsonite that is worth your life?

Assist others that may need help — and hide. Assist others nearby that may need help in their escape. However, do not fall victim to someone else's reluctance to flee. Get out. If you are trapped, find an office, closet, or classroom. Close and lock the door; barricade it with heavy furniture if necessary.

Find something heavy to hide behind. A large desk or heavy piece of equipment will do nicely. At a recent mall shooting, a store employee quickly closed the heavy gate at the entry to the store so the shooter could not enter. Great thinking!

Keep yourself quiet. Stay quiet and silence your cellphone. The last thing you need is for it to give away your position. Shut off any radios or TVs nearby that may draw the shooter's attention.

Call 911. Once you have escaped the area or have barricaded yourself in a room, then call 911. Take a deep breath and stay calm. Easier said than done, but the 911 operator will need to understand what you are trying to convey. Your information is a monumental help to responding law enforcement and fire/rescue. Let the operator know where you are located and whether anyone with you is injured.

Did you see anyone else injured as you attempted to escape or head to your hiding place? How many gunmen are there? If you caught a glimpse of the shooters, provide their physical description to 911 (height, weight, race, clothing, etc.). What type weapons did they have, handguns or rifles?

The FBI reports that in two percent of cases the shooter brings along improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Let the operator know if you heard an explosion or you saw the suspect carrying any strange looking

see KREBS on p. 9

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No BR on Dec. 26

Due to postal regulations that limit The Baptist Record to 50 issues per year, the newspaper will not publish on December 26. The next issue of The Baptist Record will be dated January 2. The next issue available for news and advertisements will be dated January 9, and all published deadlines remain in effect for that issue.

The staff of The Baptist Record wishes to thank you for your faithful support and readership during 2013. We wish you a Merry Christmas, a joyous celebration of the birth of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ, and a Happy New Year.



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CDC report: U.S. abortions on decline, but not in NYC

ATLANTA (BP) — Abortions are on the decline in the United States, though numbers remain shockingly high in New York City, according to a federal Center for Disease Control (CDC) report released last month.

From 2001-10, the number of reported legal abortions in the United States fell by nine percent. The number of teenagers getting abortions dropped

most significantly, probably due in part to the overall drop in teenage pregnancies.

For that 10-year period, the abortion rate among teenagers fell about 30%. The six states not included in the study had not provided data for each of the 10 years.

The study used voluntary data from 44 states, New York City, and the District of Columbia.

The number of abortions in New York City alone remains incredibly high: 83,750 in 2010. That amounts to 694 abortions for every 1,000 live births. No other jurisdiction approaches that high an abortion ratio.

Other city health reports have shown that nearly 40% of pregnancies in New York end in abortion.

Also from the CDC's New York numbers, 82% of abortions in the city were performed on African American or Hispanic women.

The CDC authors noted that the numbers, because they are voluntary, significantly underreport abortions compared to the more fully researched Guttmacher Institute studies. For 2008, the

CDC reported 825,564 abortions while Guttmacher reported 1.21 million abortions.

The CDC released another report Dec. 6 compiled from its own data as well as outside sources like Guttmacher that shows, since 1990, the abortion rate has fallen 32%.

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Human evolution debate heats up with discovery in Spain

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (BP) — The discovery of DNA evidence in a cave in Spain is incongruent with current theories of human evolution, according to a report based on interviews with believers in Darwinian evolution in *The New York Times*.

The *Times* reported the retrieval of ancient human DNA from a fossil that evolutionists date from 400,000 years ago. The fossil came from a cave in Spain where 28 nearly complete skeletons have been found.

Since researchers believed all of the skeletons were from the Neanderthal species, they expected the new fossil also would be a Neanderthal. To their surprise, DNA analysis suggests the fossil is of Denisovan origin, a species previously regarded as limited to East Asia nearly 4,000 miles from the cave in Spain.

Since it is doubtful that a Denisovan could have traveled that far, evolutionists have no explanation for the presence of a Denisovan fossil among the Neanderthals of Western Europe and Asia, according to *The Times'* Dec. 4 report.

Creation scientists from a diversity of viewpoints are weighing in on the matter. Georgia Purdom, a molecular geneticist and associate of Answers in Genesis, believes the fossils found in Spain represent human descendants of Noah's family who migrated out from the Tower of Babel approximately 4,250 years ago and likely became isolated from other human populations.

Purdom holds the Young Earth view of creation that the earth was created in six days 6,000 years ago.

Purdom described the mitochondrial DNA of all these species as similar to modern humans with only minor differences, likely due to their isolation from humans outside their group.

Based on genetic data alone,

it is unlikely that scientists will be able to determine exactly how the two groups, though geographically far apart, are closely related. Both groups have to be descendants of Noah's family since they were the only humans who survived the flood, Purdom said.

Casey Luskin, research coordinator for the Center for Science and Culture at Discovery Institute, believes Neanderthals and Denisovans were human. The Discovery Institute is a proponent of Intelligent Design, which holds that no evolutionary process could have led to life on earth.

Luskin said evolutionists are trying to create an evolutionary tree to link modern humans with pre-human groups, but the DNA they are finding does not indicate that modern man evolved from non-human forms.

All of these species look very similar to modern man and do not show any evidence of being non-human, Luskin said, noting, "Sure, the DNA is a little different, but not enough that it indicates a different species."

These ancient creatures are so similar to modern man, Luskin said, that if a Neanderthal was walking down the street today, he would not be noticed. "The latest find confirms only that they found another human bone," Luskin said.

Fazale Rana, a biochemist and executive vice president of research and apologetics for Reasons to Believe, offers an Old Earth perspective, a creationism viewpoint that accepts the scientific community's assessment of the Earth's age. Rana said he does not believe the Neanderthal and Denisovan creatures were human.

"It is important to understand when evolutionary scientists use the term 'human,' they mean something very different from what you and I are talking about when we use the term," he said.



MEETING TOGETHER — International Mission Board president Tom Elliff (center) shares his testimony during a house church meeting in Havana, Cuba. The group meets in the home of Daniel González, pastor of McCall Baptist Church. It is one of 60 house churches established by the McCall church. (IMB photo)

Elliff: Cubans' faith 'changed my life'

HAVANA, Cuba (BP) — The recent storm took everyone by surprise. It turned streets in Havana, Cuba, into rivers, lifting manhole covers on water bubbling from drainage pipes unable to contain the surge racing to the sea.

In Vuelta, 180 miles to the east, rural roads turned to mush, making it impossible to travel from surrounding villages into the city for the constitution of nine new churches.

"The Cuban church is resilient," said International Mission Board (IMB) president Tom Elliff during his first visit to the island nation this December. "It is like the Royal Palm (a symbol of the island), which jettisons its fronds when a major storm rakes the land and can bend horizontal to the ground and still survive."

Revolution in 1959 moved Cuba from a dictatorship to socialism. Its economy faltered during the transition. There were hard times. People struggled. Churches were closed and pastors imprisoned.

There was a time "it looked like everything was over," said Hermes Soto, rector of the Baptist Seminary in Havana. In

1965, the majority of the pastors were imprisoned. A large number of seminary students and young church leaders were put in reeducation camps. Soto spent five years in a labor camp.

Despite the crisis, the churches remained open under lay leadership. Even in these hard times, Cuban Baptist commitment to international missions remained strong and they continued to participate in the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

In 1991, the Cuban constitution was changed to make discrimination based on religious belief unlawful. The government was still reticent to allow construction of new church buildings but officials said, "Open your homes."

"Then the churches woke up," Soto said. "We had to discover how to react in response to this miracle."

From 1960-90, Cuban Baptists started 28 churches. From 1990-93, they started 28 more. After 1993, the number exploded in a church planting movement seen in few other parts in the

world. Today, an estimated 900 churches and 6,500-plus missions and house churches can be found across the island. Cuban Baptists are sending missionaries to other parts of the world.

"I found it surprising, almost shocking to find some of the greatest expressions of faith within 100 miles of the United States," Elliff said.

He proposes an expanded relationship between Cuban and Southern Baptists. "The thing that astonished me is how much they have to teach us, not how much we have to teach them."

"We can benefit from the example of their undying faith... the strength of their faith. They can benefit from our resources... our years of history in missions. Together, we could be a powerful influence for Christ throughout the entire world."

Sitting with men who God rescued from the most difficult of situations and seeing how they have moved on from there had a profound effect on Elliff. "It has changed my life. I will not view the Christian faith the same... ever again."

It was early Sunday morning and I was on my way to preach at one of our fine churches. Thanksgiving had passed and the date was December 1. My journey on that Sunday morning took me down some roads that I do not travel every day. I was just looking at the landscape and keeping my eye on the road. Then I saw a house just off of the road sitting on what appeared to be several acres of land. Then I noticed something very unusual. It was probably what called my attention to the house. For all across the front of the house on what may have been an acre of land there were piles of plastic. It was impossible to tell for sure what they were, but I thought I knew what they probably had been. They were blowup Christmas ornaments, but now without the wind and the lights they were just a small pile of leftovers from the night before.

I guess if I had been there eight or 10 hours earlier, I would have been fascinated with what I saw. But in the morning light, it simply looked like trash in someone's yard that needed to be cleaned up. The problem was that it takes wind and light to bring meaning and understanding to whatever these Christmas characters were. No doubt you have seen or maybe even have some of these Christmas blowup ornaments. They make all kinds of them. There are reindeers, trees, Santa figures, and I have even seen some manger scenes that were blowup plastic figurines. Without wind and light all of them are basically empty piles of plastic. They are neither attractive or in any way meaningful when they are deflated. Although I will admit I let up on the gas and looked out across the yard, I was unable to tell what



Deflated

anything was. I simply drove on by and reflected on how empty their Christmas setting was.

Later as I reflected on the piles of plastic, I wondered how many people find that to be a parable of their Christmas. I thought about how many churches have lost the true wonder of Christmas, and they are left in part with only empty shells of what could be. For the images in that front yard to come to life, they required two significant things — wind and light. **These same two things — wind and light — also apply to our spiritual lives. They are essential for the coming of Jesus to have meaning.**

This wind that is needed is not the kind that just blows through some hose into a plastic creature and makes it stand up. It is wind representing the very presence of God to move, shape and change us. It is the same wind that Jesus spoke to

Nicodemus about when He said, "The wind blows and you do not understand it, but you know that it is there." It was the wind, like the sound that came on Pentecost Day which was rushing and powerful. It alerted everyone that God was up to something big. Maybe the greatest thing that could ever happen at this Christmas Season is not a gift to be bought or given and not for us to gather and just sing songs and tell a story that at times may seem stale to us. Oh, no! Not when that wind comes.

The wind of God fills our lives, reshapes our existence and pumps our hearts full of overflowing with God's love. When that wind blows among us, the most ancient of Christmas Carols become a living, breathing point of communication with our hearts once again. When that wind comes, hearing a story that is over 2000 years old suddenly stands up and marches almost with the sound of thunder in our hearts to walk

across our lives again and remind us of the great gift of God's love pulsating in our presence again. Empty, meaningless — hardly, for when the wind blows with God's presence moving among us, the story of God's invasion in Bethlehem comes to life.

Light is also needed. When you and I begin to look at the Christmas story it is announced by light. It is in every way and in every day shimmering light. The prophet Isaiah said that a light would come. A star that had never been seen before began to shine and then as shepherds, Wise Men, and many of us gather at the feet of Jesus we begin to see and experience what John described in his wonderful Gospel. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). God with the spotlight of His love was shining on Jesus, His Son. Without that light your Christmas and my Christmas would be only empty decorations, piles of paper, and meaningless days off from work and school. But with that light turned on, the world comes alive with God's presence and His saving love.

Christmas is not just some piles of plastic in a front yard. At its deepest meaning, it is the incredible life of God living in us through Jesus Christ by which the world is able to see that He is the Light of the world. We are the light bearers in this world. Merry Christmas to you and may the wind of God blow upon your heart and the brilliance of God's light shine upon your path.

The author can be contacted at directions@mbcb.org.

'Reading Music: Rhythm and Pitch' course offered across state in January

JACKSON, Ms. (Special) — January begins the third of eight courses offered at five locations in Mississippi sponsored by the Church Music Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB), in cooperation with the Providence Learning Center of New Orleans Seminary.

The course, Reading Music: Rhythm/Pitch, will meet once a week for two hours for eight consecutive weeks (the Brookhaven location meets on Saturday) at the following locations and times:

■ First Church, Cleveland, beginning January 13 (6-8 p.m.). Alan Berry, teacher (662) 843-2701.

■ First Church, Marion, beginning January 13 (6:30-8:30 p.m.). Buddy McElroy, teacher (601) 938-8668.

■ Easthaven Church, Brookhaven, beginning January 18 (9-11 a.m.). Mark Hamilton, teacher (601) 835-6607.

■ First Church, Booneville, beginning January 14 (6:30-8:30 p.m.). LuAnne Ford, teacher, (662) 728-6272.

■ Handsboro Church, Gulfport, beginning January 13 (7-9 p.m.). Louis White, Teacher, (228) 860-9616.

The eight courses are Basic Conducting; Worship/Worship Planning; Reading Music: Rhythm/Pitch; Read-

ing Music: Harmony/Melody; Songs and Hymns for Worship; Building Your Music Ministry; Church Music Resources; and Class Voice.

The courses are designed to provide basic training for bivocational music directors and other music leaders in churches. In most locations the eight courses meet two hours per week with each course being eight weeks in length. Saturday locations may vary.

The cycle of courses is scheduled over a two-year period. Each course is independent and has no prerequisite. Each student who completes the eight courses earns a certificate from the Providence Learning Center of New Orleans Seminary.

There is a one-time enrollment fee of \$25.00. The cost of each course is \$100.00. A \$60.00 scholarship is available for all first-time students. Students already enrolled are not eligible. The grant is limited to one person per church.

For more information, contact the listed teachers or Slater Murphy, MBCB director of church music, at P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone: (601) 292-3276 or toll free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 276. E-mail: smurphy@mbcb.org.



Fire severely damages First Church, Magee

Brad Van Cleve, Student and Recreation Minister, First Church, Magee, is shown standing in the office area at the point where a devastating fire began early on the morning of December 11. A Magee policeman on routine patrol discovered the fire and placed a call to dispatchers at 4:07 a.m. Quick response by fire and police departments from Magee and Mendenhall kept the damage from being more extensive. While the actual fire was contained in one small area of the church, smoke damage was extensive in the sanctuary and rest of the building. The church was able to have Wednesday prayer services in the Family Life Center and present their Christmas musical in the gym on the following Sunday. Buddy Keyes, pastor. (photo by Tony Martin)

Forty-Nine Years and Counting!

As the year 2013 draws to a close, the Christian Action Commission is preparing to celebrate its 50th birthday in 2014. The Mississippi Baptist Convention at its annual meeting in 1964 gave life to the CAC by electing the first twelve members to the newly formed "Commission." What was once an idea and a vision became a reality.

Many months of prayer, planning and discussion went into defining the scope of work for this newly created arm of Mississippi Baptists. On July 5, 1966, Dr. J. Clark Hensley was officially elected to become the commission's first Executive Director. He served until early 1982 and on May 1, 1982, Dr. Paul Griffin Jones III, former Chairman of the Dept. of Biblical Studies of East Texas University in Commerce, Texas, became the Commission's second Executive Director-Treasurer, serving until retirement in 1999.

Early on the Commission was wise in adopting this statement that rings loud and true till this day. "It is a well-known fact among Baptists that no group speaks with authority for the local Baptist church. It is only as Bible truths make their impact upon the minds and hearts of members of a local congregation and the group acts on its own volition that any particular group action can be taken. The spirit of the work of the Christian Action Commission is one of genuine concern for a realistic approach to putting the principles of Christ into action in moral choices by individual Christians and by churches..."

On April 4, 1987, the Commis-

sion was legally incorporated as The Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission, a 501-C3 non-profit religious organization. At this time the areas of

work and concern included topics such as, alcohol and drugs, church-state relations, Christian citizenship, Christian home, pornography, human relations, along with other moral and social problems as they arose.

The landscape and the issues have changed multiple times in the past 49 years, but some things have been consistent. First, Mississippi Baptists have been faithful in supporting the work of this Commission. You have prayed for, participated in and financially

supported the ministry of this organization. Second, the CAC has been blessed with hundreds of men and women who have volunteered to serve as a trustee. Third, the CAC has enjoyed the association with and the support of the leadership of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

Time and space does not allow one to recap all the issues, all the situations, and all the events that have transpired over 49 years. Each new year brought new challenges such as race relations, a drug culture, legalization of abortion, proliferation of pornography, rise and expansion of gambling, destruction of the family unit, homosexuality, and issues of religious freedom. Even as I pen these words I am aware of new issues that are on the horizon that will challenge our faith and fortitude.

On April 1, 2000, I became the third Executive Director-Treasurer in the history of the CAC. I, like some of you, have wondered, "Are we really necessary, are we making a difference at all?" As a pastor, I could see numerical growth in membership and money—our inefficient way of measuring most everything. But here those measurements, however artificial they might be, do not exist. Yet, when I pass an automobile with a Choose Life car tag, I rejoice in knowing that this tag has enabled over 2.6 million dollars to be given to Crisis Pregnancy Centers in Mis-

issippi over the past 12 years. It took about three years to get our legislators to approve this tag. When I see a young child smiling who I know was once considered for an abortion, I thank God for some of the strictest abortion laws in the land. Just maybe we have mattered a little bit over the course of time.

Thank you for all your prayers, for your financial support, and for your words of encouragement. The major financial support for the CAC is through your church giving to the Cooperative Program. The CAC is a 501-C3 non-profit organization and individual financial gifts can be made directly to the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission, PO Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205. These gifts are tax deductible and are used to strengthen the ministry of the Commission.

Mrs. Rita McCollum, our Ministry Assistant, Mr. Rob Chambers, our Senior Consultant (and soon to be Dr. Rob Chambers with a PhD in Ethics from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary), and I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year. Contact us anytime at 601-292-3329 or text us at 601-207-7077.

Porter serves as executive director-treasurer for the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission. He can be contacted at 601-292-3332 or jporter@christianaction.com.



with Jimmy Porter

MS POSITIONS

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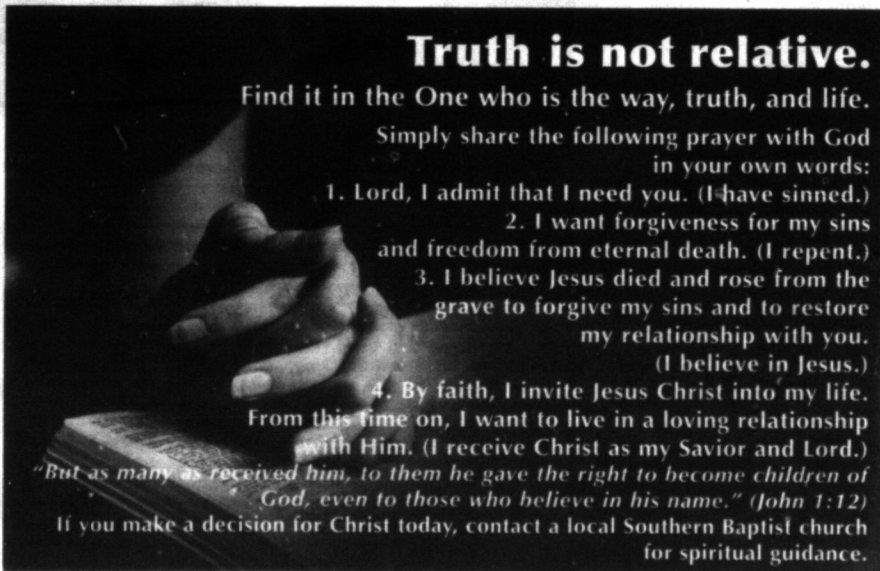
Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life.

From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.



Just for the Record



The children's choir of **GOODWATER CHURCH, MEEHAN**, presented the musical *Star of Wonder* Dec. 8. Sandy Johnson and Amy Rogers, leaders.



The Young at Heart of **FLOWOOD CHURCH, FLOWOOD**, toured the Mississippi Governor's Mansion.



ENID LAKE CHURCH, PANOLA ASSOCIATION, ordained Jeffrey Lewis Tankersley to the ministry June 2. Shown are Tankersley and Cynthia Tankersley.



SHILOH CHURCH, SONTAG, was recognized by the Lawrence County Association as the top giving church to the Lottie Moon Christmas offering. Shown are Don Lum and Luke Martin.



Perry Sanderford, Crossroads Counseling Center, is shown presenting Betty Crawford with a plaque for 25 years of service to the **RANKIN COUNTY ASSOCIATION** and Crossroads Counseling Center.



CALVARY CHURCH, SUMMIT, purchased gifts to distribute to needy children as a mission project. Shown are Tracey Boyd, Taylor Thornton, and Dawn Thornton.



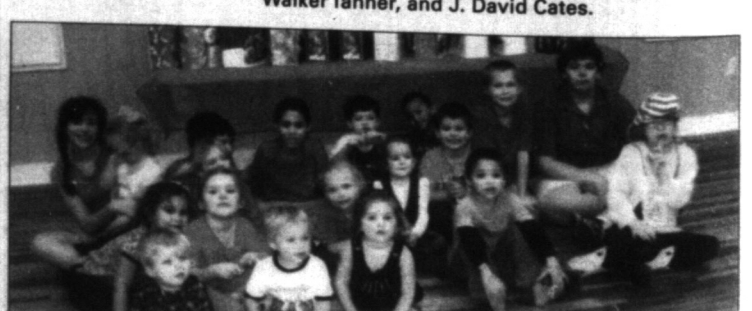
FAIRVIEW CHURCH, COLUMBUS, is honoring organist Myra McAdams who is retiring after 25+ years of service.



TOOMSUBA CHURCH, LAUDERDALE ASSOCIATION, recently held a baby dedication for Rhett Walker Tanner. Shown, front row, are Kaidence Young, Karlee Young, and Cooper Tanner; back row, Trey Tanner, Cassidy Tanner, Rhett Walker Tanner, and J. David Cates.



The GAs of **FIRST CHURCH, POTTS CAMP**, attended the Mother-Daughter weekend at Garaywa Camp and Conference Center Nov. 15 - 16.



Children from **CALVARY CHURCH, VICKSBURG**, are shown enjoying their Christmas party.



Together we are funding the Great Commission

As I've had opportunities to share with church groups in Mississippi about real-time missions accomplished through the Cooperative Program, the International Mission Board, and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, I have come to think of myself as a poster child for CP and Lottie Moon.

Now, lest that frighten you, let me clarify that just as you can't blame all of a child's errors on their raising, I hastily take responsibility for all my human failings. But the good stuff—the heritage rich in love for missions and the world-view like no other, afforded from a missionary kid's perspective—I credit largely to the unique plan and concept of the Cooperative Program, your Southern Baptist partnership strategy to support our global efforts to fulfill the Great Commission.

It was my absolute privilege to grow up on the mission field, as one of your IMB "MK's." From day one, my family functioned as a team—which meant that I wasn't just along for the ride, but was considered an active participant in missions as we worked together to reach our community and much wider regions with the love of Christ.

When we were stateside, we weren't saddled with the burden and pressures of having to raise an explicit dollar amount to ensure that we would be able to return to the field. (We had friends commissioned through other organizations who did bear the weight of that responsibility.) Instead, we had the great joy of returning here to share with the Church how your gifts are being used in tangible ministry around the world.

Sharing with churches here in the States, there are a couple of recurring themes my dad always touched on in his messages. He always conveys our thanks, quoting Philip- plans 1:3-5, bringing recognition to our appreciation for the support received from our Southern Baptist churches.

Also, he makes a point to address the fact that while there are many great non-profit and missions organizations ministering throughout the world, it is the focus of your International Mission Board to grow the Church. So when a community is assisted by an IMB missionary to obtain clean water, or when English is taught as a second language to students, it is all done with the direct intent of creating opportunities to share the Gospel, make disciples, and grow the body of Christ.

Even before I came to work for the Mississippi Baptist Foundation, where I am learning more about how the law of large numbers works, the Cooperative Program was a simple enough concept for even this Liberal Arts grad to grasp and understand. When we all give together, we can do so much more. It frustrates me that the majority of twenty-somethings (my age) in Southern Baptist churches don't have any idea what the Cooperative Program is, or that it has any impact in their world, or is relevant to them.

There's a disconnect, possibly because it's easier to understand organizations that focus on meeting one specific human need or one element of our missional directive, while the CP covers innumerable facets of our calling to be, as the IMB emphasis used for last year read, "His heart, His hands, His voice."

Lottie Moon herself recognized that as one missionary, she was limited in the work she would be able to accomplish, the lives she could touch, in China. We, as individuals, cannot be everywhere at once or meet every need in our vast world. It seems to me though, that if we continue to support and allow it to operate as intended, the Cooperative Program is our best shot to facilitate God's vision of reaching a lost world through His Church.

To view this Cooperative Program Testimony online, please visit <http://www.mbc.org/cp/videos.aspx>

Just for the Record

In other Church News:

> **Stronghope Church, Wesson**, is presenting a live nativity Dec. 20 - 22, 5:30-7 p.m. at the Stronghope Community Ballpark.

> **Pelahatchie Church, Pelahatchie**, will host Danny Funderburk in concert Dec. 29, 6 p.m. Love offering.

> **Trinity First Church, Whistler Community, Wayne County**, will host The Singing Echoes in concert Jan. 3, 7 p.m. Love offering.

> **Neshoba Church, Union**, will observe a candlelight service Dec. 25, 6 p.m.

> **First Church, Pearl**, is hosting a New Year's Eve gospel singing Dec. 31, 7 p.m., featuring The Men of Music, Tim Frith and Gospel Echoes, The Revelations, and Jason Runnels. Free.



The Christian Womens Job Corp, **NESHOBA COUNTY ASSOCIATION**, expanded ministry this semester into a Basic Sewing Skills Class, taught by Wanda Jackson. Shown are Jennifer Alvarez and Shirley Young with their aprons and other creations.



The children of **BEULAH CHURCH, DECATUR**, presented a Christmas play entitled *The Flower of the Holy Night* Dec. 8. Directors were Brenda Bynum, Dixie Rivers, and Nikki Hawkins.

The children and their leaders of **MT. PISGAH CHURCH, CARROLLTON**, enjoyed a picture with Santa and Mrs. Claus Dec. 1, and also enjoyed a day of pottery making with Joyce Huff. Lanny Haley, pastor.



GRACE CHURCH, VICKSBURG, held a dedication ceremony for the stained glass entitled *Jesus Knocking at the Door*. Peggy Williams and Judy Gilley created the artwork for the church. The face and hands of Jesus were painted by Johanna Bush. Shown are pastor H. Bryan Able, Williams, Andy Williams, Sandra Harrigill, Larry Harrigill, Gilley, and Foster Gilley.

Obamacare abortion mandate explained as fight drags on

Editor's note: Following is provided by the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville, and distributed by Baptist Press.

WASHINGTON (BP and local reports) — The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to hear a pair of cases that challenge the HHS mandate requiring most private companies' insurance to provide coverage for contraceptives and abortifacients (drugs that induce abortions).

The Obama administration asked the high court to review the issue after a federal appeals court in Colorado found in favor of Hobby Lobby, an Oklahoma-based crafts franchise that opposes the mandates. The court will combine the Hobby Lobby case with lesser-known case involving Conestoga, a Pennsylvania company that lost earlier bids for relief from the mandate.

These are among the questions people are asking about the issue:

Q: What is this contraception mandate?

A: As part of the Affordable Care Act, the universal health insurance reform passed in 2010 (often referred to as Obamacare), all group health plans must now provide at no cost to the recipient certain "preventive services." The list of services mandated by the federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) includes sterilization, contraceptives, and abortifacient drugs.

Q: If this mandate is from 2010, why are we talking about it in 2013?

A: On Jan. 20, 2012, the Obama administration announced that it would not expand the exemption for this mandate to include religious schools, colleges, hospitals and charitable service organizations. Instead, the administration merely extended the deadline for religious groups who do not already fall within the existing narrow exemption so that they will have one more year to comply or drop health care insurance coverage for their employees altogether and incur a hefty fine.

Q: Is there a religious exemption from the mandate? If so, who qualifies for the exemption?

A: According to the Washington, D.C.-based Beckett Fund for Religious Liberty, which is representing the Southern Baptist Convention's GuideStone Financial Resources in one of the suits and is described on its web site as a non-profit, public-interest legal and educational institute with a mission to protect the free expression of all faiths, there is a "religious employer" exemption from the mandate but it is extremely narrow and will, in practice, cover very few religious employers.

The exemption may cover certain churches and religious orders that inculcate religious values "as [their] purpose" and which primarily employ and serve those who share their faith. Many religious organizations including hospitals, charitable service organizations, and schools cannot meet this definition. They will be forced to choose between covering drugs and services contrary to their religious beliefs or cease to offer health plans to their employees and incur substantial fines.

"Not even Jesus' ministry would qualify for this exemption," the Beckett Fund notes, "because He fed, healed, served and taught non-Christians."

Q: Doesn't the mandate only apply to religious organizations that receive federal funding?

A: No. The mandate applies to religious employers even if they receive no federal funding.

Q: When did the government begin requiring employer insurance programs to pay for contraceptives?

A: According to the Beckett Fund, the trend toward state-mandated contraceptive coverage in employee health insurance plans began in the mid-1990s and was accelerated by the decision of Congress in 1998 to guarantee contraceptive coverage to employees of the federal government through the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP).

After FEHBP, the largest employer-insurance benefits program in the country, set this precedent, the private sector followed suit, and state legislatures began to make such coverage mandatory.

Q: Why is the federal government dictating that contraceptives should be covered by insurance?

A: In 2000, the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission issued an opinion stating that the refusal to cover contraceptives in an employee prescription health plan constituted gender discrimination in violation of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (PDA). That law was adopted by Congress in 1978 in response to a Supreme Court decision holding that an employer's selective refusal to cover pregnancy-related disability was not sex discrimination within the meaning of Title VII, the primary federal law addressing employment discrimination.

As the Beckett Fund notes, "Although this opinion is not binding on federal courts, it is influential, since the EEOC is the government body charged with enforcing Title VII. This opinion led to many lawsuits against non-religious employers who refused to cover prescription contraceptives."

The federal district courts have split over the issue of whether the

PDA requires employers to provide contraception. The only federal court of appeals to address the issue held that the PDA did not include a contraceptive mandate.

Q: What about the First Amendment protections? Isn't such a requirement inherently unconstitutional?

A: In *Employment Division v. Smith*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the First Amendment's free exercise clause "does not relieve an individual of the obligation to comply with a valid and neutral law of general applicability," simply because "the law proscribes (or prescribes) conduct that his religion prescribes (or proscribes)."

According to the Beckett Fund, this means that the fact that an act infringes on the religious beliefs or regulates the religiously motivated policies of a religious institution does not necessarily make the law unconstitutional.

Q: Doesn't this seem to be primarily a Catholic issue?

A: No. Although the Catholic Church has been the most vocal opponent of the mandate, many Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim leaders also oppose the mandate. In fact, several evangelical leaders have called on evangelicals to stand with Catholics in civil disobedience to this law.

Additionally, 300 academics and religious leaders signed a statement by the Beckett Fund explaining why the mandate is "unacceptable."

Q: I don't oppose contraceptives, so why should I care about this issue?

A: There are two reasons that all Christians, regardless of their view on contraceptives, should be concerned about this mandate.

The first reason is because it forces Christians to pay for abortion-inducing drugs. The policy currently requires coverage of Ulipristal (marketed as "ella"), which is chemically similar to the abortion drug RU-486 (mifepristone) and has the same effect to prevent embryos from being implanted or, if already implanted, to die from lack of nutrition.

Additionally, RU-486 also is being tested for possible use as an "emergency contraceptive" to be administered in the days after unprotected sex to prevent a fertilized egg from developing. If the FDA approves it for that purpose, it will automatically be included under the mandate.

The second reason is that it restricts religious liberty by forcing religious institutions to pay for contraceptives and abortifacients even if the employer has a religious or moral objection to such practices.

Q: While it may be a pro-life concern, why is it a religious lib-

erty issue for me since I support the use of contraception?

A: If the mandate is allowed to stand, it will set a precedent that the government can not only force citizens to violate their most deeply held beliefs but that we can be sanctioned for refusing to do so.

As John Leo, a writer and senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research in New York City has noted, today it is contraceptives and abortifacients, but "down the road it will be about suicide pills, genetic engineering, abortion, and mandatory abortion training, transgender operations, and a whole new series of morally problematic procedures about to come over the horizon."

As Leo, a former syndicated columnist for U.S. News and World Report magazine, has recounted, a Catholic-run California hospital was sued because it refused to perform breast-enlargement surgery on a transgendered patient. The state court ruled the hospital had violated the state's anti-discrimination laws. Caving under litigation, the hospital paid \$200,000 to the transgendered man.

Q: Didn't the Obama administration offer a compromise?

A: In response to the con-

cerns of religious organizations, Obama offered a "compromise" in which he proposed that insurance companies, instead of religious institutions, be required to cover procedures and products that they find objectionable at no cost in their insurance policies. In other words, the insurer would be required to provide the services "free of charge" and pay for them out of their own pocket.

As economist Steve Landsburg has noted, the proposed compromise does not really change the fact that the religious employers are still being forced to pay for contraceptives and abortifacients:

"[A]ll economists ... understand that transferring the responsibility from employers to insurers amounts to transferring the cost from [insurers] to insurance buyers, which is to say that it's not a change in policy. One of the first and most important lessons we teach our students is well summarized by a slogan: 'The economic burden of a tax is independent of the legal burden.'"

"Ditto for a mandated insurance purchase. It is not the law, but the underlying price-sensitivities of buyers and sellers that determines where the burden ultimately falls. Your president knows this. He's banking that you don't."

Submission Guidelines

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published.

Preferred method: news may be submitted electronically to the e-mail address below, and must be included in the message segment of an e-mail form. Secondary method: news may be typewritten or neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper and mailed. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone. Due to ever-present virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments in JPEG format are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs must be submitted electronically via e-mail, as attachments in JPEG format. Hard copy photographs mailed through the postal service will not be accepted. Photographs must be clear, sharp, and well-lit. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. Photographs containing inappropriate gestures and objectionable clothing will not be published. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items that do not reproduce well on newsprint are generally not publishable.

There is no guarantee that news items and/or photographs will be published, and unsolicited material will not be acknowledged or returned. All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date. Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. These guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive.

Submit news to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

College News



MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE'S initial class of 29 physician assistants is on track to graduate December 20, and many will go to work in the medically underserved Magnolia State. Based at the Baptist Healthplex, the two-and one-half year program proved rigorous and time consuming, but the graduate students say they're well prepared to join a profession in high demand nationwide. Working with the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson, federal clinics and other medical facilities in the region, Mississippi College's program began classes in May 2011. For more information, contact Bob Philpot 601.925.7370 or Philpot@mc.edu. Shown are five members of the first graduating class.

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Clue: D = F

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Luke 12:32

By Charles Marx, 1932-2004, © 2005

NOBTS sets undergrad classes at Jackson Extension Center

TERRY, Ms (Special) — New Orleans Seminary (NOBTS) again will be offering undergraduate classes for Spring 2014 through the Leavell College at the Jackson Extension Center at Broadmoor Church in Madison. The following classes will meet on Mondays, starting on January 27:

- Personal Spiritual Disciplines (one hour credit), 9-10 a.m. Instructor: John Pace, pastor, First Church, Terry.

- Hermeneutics - Biblical Interpretation (three hours credit), 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Instructor: John Pace.

- Worship Perspectives (three hours credit), 1-4 p.m. Instructor: Scott Thomas, pastor, First Church, Brandon.

■ Southern Baptist Life (three hours credit), 4-7 p.m.— Matt Buckles, pastor, First Church, Vicksburg, and president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

Through this extension program, NOBTS offers accredited, affordable theological training locally, allowing students access to high quality seminary education without relocating. Through the Jackson Center, students can pursue and obtain an Associate in Christian Ministry Degree and/or a Bachelor's Degree.

NOBTS offers classes in a variety of formats that allows students to cater their schedule to meet their needs. Students can combine classes at the extension center with online classes, workshops, conference-based

courses, and hybrid courses to obtain the requirements needed for a degree.

To view the cycle of classes offered, as well as other important information about the extension center, visit www.nobts.edu/Extensions/LAMSCenters/Jackson1.html.

For more information or to start the application and enrollment process, contact John Pace, Jackson Extension Center director, at (601) 559-9352 (cell), (601) 878-5735 (church), or e-mail thepacepack@aol.com.

Norris Grubbs, NOBTS regional dean for Louisiana and Mississippi, can also be contacted at (800) NOBTS-01, ext. 3301, or e-mail lmextasst@nobts.edu.

TAYLOR

cont. from p. 1

- 2005 — summer missionary number 3,000 served.

- 2011 — summer missionary number 4,000 served.

- 2013 — summer missionary number 4,430 served.

The BSU summer missions experience has been instrumental in helping those who eventually serve in career IMB positions begin to sense God's call in their life. Through BSU summer missions and other BSU sponsored short-term missions experiences, students better understand what missions is all about and that they are able to serve, meet needs, and be used by God to spread his message of love and redemption in Christ.

Mike Lopez, IMB director of student mobilization says that approximately 80% of career IMB missionaries had their first significant missions experience

as a student, underlining the key role BSU Summer Missions plays in the development of our future missionaries.

Because the Gospel is so important, the goal of each Mississippi BSU program is to mobilize their students in ministry and missions. As each BSU seeks to reach, disciple, and mobilize involved students, Mississippi Baptists help students be obedient to the Great Commission.

Whether challenging a student to go across campus to lead a dorm Bible study or go around the world, the goal is the same — to share Jesus.

The value of Mississippi BSU missions programs cannot be easily measured, for its contributions to the growth of God's Kingdom have been exponential through more than six decades of students going and serving.

The lives touched and changed by students loving others and sharing the Good News are more than we know, but the Kingdom

is larger and greater because of their service.

All of this is not possible without the support, encouragement, and stable finances provided by Mississippi Baptists and Mississippi Baptist churches giving through the Cooperative Program. Mississippi BSU programs are there because of Cooperative Program gifts investing in missions on the college campuses of Mississippi, where this financial support allows BSU directors to engage both students from Mississippi Baptist churches and students who don't know Christ, calling both to come and follow Him.

McCracken is MBCB director of collegiate ministry. The MBCB Collegiate Ministry Department can be contacted at P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone: (601) 292-3299 or toll free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 299. E-mail: cminfo@mbcb.org.

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KREBS

cont. from p. 2

devices. At the 1999 Columbine High School shooting in Colorado, gunmen Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold set a number of IEDs throughout the school grounds.

■ **Clarify your identity.** When the police arrive, put your hands up and drop anything that might be in your hands. Remember, they aren't positive who the shooter might be. In fact, someone else seeing you running away may have mistaken the cellphone in your hand as a weapon and provided your description to responding officers. There have also been instances where suspects have changed clothes.

■ **Follow the officers' directions.** Follow the direction of responding officers exactly.

You may even be handcuffed initially. Do not argue! Follow officers' directions on which way to evacuate. Do not attempt to retrieve personal belongings prior to exiting!

■ **Save a life, if possible.**

The reality of these situations is that people will be injured. Some may die. However, you may be able to save a life with a few simple interventions. If someone is bleeding, grab whatever absorbent material is nearby — towel, shirt, even a sock — and apply direct pressure to the wound. Most bleeding can be controlled in this manner.

If no absorbent material is readily available, you can use the heel of your hand. Rarely are there rubber gloves available to protect against the spread of disease; any plastic material within arm's reach will do.

Should you hear gurgling

noises from their airway, they may be choking on blood. Roll them to their side to let the blood drain. Finally, cover them with a blanket or coat to prevent shock. These efforts may just be enough to save a life.

It would be nice to think that we would never see another mass shooting. Yet, the reality is that it will happen again. Sometimes the simplest of measures can have the biggest impact on life and death in tragic situations. Be prepared and stay safe.

Krebs, of Cockeysville, Md., is a paramedic and 40-year veteran of the fire and rescue service. His newest book, *Medic Up: Where Criminals, SWAT Teams & Medicine Intersect*, is based on his experiences in the field. For more information, visit <http://www.linkedin.com/pub/dennis-r-krebs/aaa/688>.

Celebrate Jesus at Christmas • Luke 1:30-35, 38, 46-49; 2:4-7

Merry Christmas!

Isn't this traditional greeting between American Christians reassuring and encouraging? The Christmas story in much more than a warm fuzzy legend or tradition, but it is a truly enjoyable American tradition to tell the story. We can enjoy reminding ourselves and our families of this wonderful biblical story with accurate historical details by studying the Bible.

Most Americans, especially those advanced in years, have many pleasant memories of community programs, church services, and even school programs that began with the memorable words, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, was found with child of the Holy Ghost," Matthew 1:18 (KJV).

Dr. Luke in his historical account of the Christmas story gives different details than those Matthew included in his account. Luke tells us about Mary's older relative, Elizabeth, becoming pregnant in her advanced years to give birth to John the Baptist. The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah to explain to him that he and Elizabeth were going to have a son. Then the same angel, Gabriel, appeared to the young teenager Mary with an even more important story "Gabriel greeted her:

Good morning!

You're beautiful with God's beauty,

Beauty inside and out!
God be with you.

She was thoroughly shaken, wondering what was behind a greeting like that," Luke 1:28 (The Message).

Gabriel quickly tried to settle Mary's fears. He said, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God," Luke 1:30 (HCSB). Gabriel had a unique role in announcing the birth of Jesus. Five hundred years before Gabriel's meetings with Zechariah and Mary, the angel had appeared to Daniel in the eighth and ninth chapters of the Old Testament book of Daniel to prophesy Jesus coming.

But Mary was more concerned by Gabriel's message than by his sudden appearance. Gabriel's message from God to Mary was, "You will conceive and give birth to a son," Luke 1:31 (HCSB). "Mary ask the angel, 'How can this be, since I have not been intimate with a man?'" Luke 1:34 (HCSB). The Message presents Mary's answer in these words, "But how? I've never slept with a man." Clearly, Luke the medically

trained physician, wanted his readers to understand that Mary was not pregnant as result of sexual relations with Joseph or any other man.

Mary was very aware that an unmarried woman becoming pregnant was dangerous and it would be embarrassing. There was the real possibility someone would try to follow the Old Testament adultery laws and stone her. But Mary answered, "I am the Lord's slave, . . . May it be done to me according to your word," Luke 1:38 (HCSB). "May it be done according to your word" sounds a lot like "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from Me—nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done," Luke 22:42 (HCSB).

In this praise Mary says: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed, because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and His name is holy," Luke 1:46-49 (HCSB). Then the time came for Mary to deliver

her baby so she went to the little town of Bethlehem as Micah had prophesied, "Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; One will come from you to be ruler over Israel for Me. His origin is from antiquity, from eternity," Micah 5:2 (HCSB). This specifically fulfilled another of the Messiah prophecies. We do know when this happened — when Caesar Augustus decreed a census to be sure Rome was getting all of its taxes. This is also when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. Scholars probably missed the date and it was not 0 AD and probably not December 25. December 25, 0 AD is not a biblical fact and therefore not dependable. But God's Son being born in Bethlehem during the reign of Caesar Augustus, while Cyrenius was governor of Syria, are facts directly from the Bible.

And while Joseph and Mary were in the stable Jesus was born and Mary "wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn," Luke 2:7 (KJV). These biblical facts are historically accurate as is truth stated by the angels: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord," Luke 2:11 (KJV).

Hicks is a consultant in the Discipleship and Family Ministry Department, Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, and a member of Brandon Church, Brandon.



Explore the Bible
with Don Hicks

Courage • Matthew 1:18-25; 2:19-23

Never in his life had Joseph imagined he would find himself in this predicament. In his mind he always considered his future intertwined with Mary's, and now Mary, who was his betrothed, was going to have a baby, and the baby was not his. Joseph was deeply troubled by Mary's mysterious pregnancy. What would people say? What should he do? His heart was still tender toward Mary and he didn't want her publicly punished or humiliated. She had always been a virtuous young woman and he had looked forward to the day when they would start their family together.

In those days, a couple who were officially betrothed or engaged were considered husband and wife although the marriage was not consummated until after the period of betrothal, which was usually one year. In order to break the relationship, one had to obtain a divorce. Joseph decided that he would do that and put Mary away quietly.

While Joseph pondered these troublesome thoughts, an angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream with a message from God. The angel spoke to him to fear not to take Mary as his wife because the child conceived within her was of the Holy Ghost, and that child would be called

Jesus because He would save His people from their sins. He assured Joseph that all that was happening was prophecy being fulfilled that a virgin would conceive and bring forth a son who would be called Emmanuel, God with us. What a difference it makes when God sends His Word into the situations of our lives and allows us insight into His workings.

Joseph awoke and did exactly as the angel of the Lord had bid him to do. He took Mary for his wife and had no intimate relations with her until after the birth of Jesus. Joseph could have chosen to harden his heart and ignore the message from God, but instead he stepped forward and fulfilled the role that God had planned all along for him, to be the husband of Mary, and the earthly father to Jesus.

Joseph continued to be a man of obedience and courage, sensitive to the voice of

the Lord. After the visit of the wise men, he was warned by an angel of the Lord in a dream to take the young child and his mother into Egypt because Herod was seeking the child to destroy him. While they were in Egypt, Herod died. God sent an angelic messenger once again in a dream to tell Joseph to arise and take the young child and his mother, and return to Israel, for those who sought the young child's life were dead.

Joseph responded faithfully and courageously and headed for Israel with his young family.

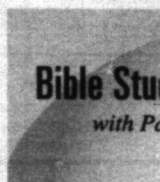
When Joseph entered Israel and heard that the evil and violent son of Herod, Archelaus, ruled in Judaea, he was afraid to go there. Some scholars think that perhaps Joseph had decided that Jerusalem was the appropriate place for the young Messiah to be raised, but being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into Galilee, into the city of

Nazareth, a city despised by many.

The Life Application Bible Commentary states about Joseph: "The strength of what we believe is measured by how much we are willing to suffer for those beliefs. Joseph was a man with strong beliefs. He was prepared to do what was right despite the pain he knew it would cause. But Joseph had another trait—he not only tried to do what was right; he tried to do it the right way."

Joseph learned that despite fear, great danger, obstacles and embarrassment, the right way is always God's way. It takes courage to follow God as He directs our paths, especially in the hard places of our lives. Consider what Joseph would have missed had he not yielded to God's will. Consider how his heart must have overflowed that night in Bethlehem when the Christ Child was born! That was an immeasurable blessing for him to be there with his beloved Mary as the Savior of the world was born. Obedience to God always brings blessings. The way may be difficult as we follow where God is leading us, but He alone knows the plans that He has for us and the joys that await us if we will but follow Him.

Foster is a member of Murphy Creek Church, Louisville.



Bible Studies for Life
with Patsy Foster

YEC

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2012 YEC. More information on Phillips can be viewed at bethanybarrphillips.com.

The top three speakers from the 2013 Mississippi Baptist

Speakers Tournament held earlier this year will also address participants. They include:

■ Rachel Reeves, member of Monticello Church, Monticello.

■ Tony Daniel, member of Union Church, Brandon.

■ Brent Breland, member of Central Church, Poplarville.

Registration at the door begins at 1:30 p.m. on Dec. 30 at A.E. Wood Coliseum on the Mississippi College campus in Clinton. Cost is \$15 per person at the door.

There will be an adult volunteer meeting at 2 p.m. on Dec. 30 in the Field House next to the Coli-

seum. The first session will begin on Dec. 30 at 2:30 p.m. and dismiss at 4:30 p.m. for supper on your own. Session Two will begin Dec. 30 at 7 p.m. and dismiss at 9 p.m. Session Three will begin on Dec. 31 at 9 a.m. and dismiss at 12:30 p.m.

For more information, in-

cluding the session agendas and area restaurants and accommodations, visit http://mbcb.org/events_details.aspx?ID=2815.

The Mississippi Baptist Youth Evangelism Challenge is supported each year by gifts to the Mississippi Cooperative Program.

Stay Open and Obedient • John 15:1-17

"I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit," John 15:5 (KJV) is a great promise for one who loves Jesus and whose heart's desire is to share the Gospel. Success feels better and is much better in every way than failure. Well, this statement about success is really only true if the goal has real lasting value. Serving Jesus by sharing the Good News of life thru Christ has real lasting value for all of eternity.

Jesus is here making a great promise but the disciples are having trouble understanding these great truths that Jesus is sharing with them on the eve of his death. They desperately needed these great promises but were having a very hard time understand what Jesus was telling them. Christians today find ourselves in the same shoes as the eleven disciples. We know that God knew we would have these troubles and needs, because the Holy Spirit preserved this teaching in the Gospel of John.

Our need to study this passage is great and Christ gives us some keys to help us understand it.

1. "I (Jesus) am the true vine,
2. "and my Father is the gardener," John 15:1 (NIV).
3. "I am the vine; you are the braches.

4. "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; 5. "apart from me you can do nothing," John 15:5 (NIV).

6. "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you," John 15:3 (NIV).

Now, with these keys reread the analogy of the Vine in John 15:1-8 and see if you find even deeper truths.

Branches on a vine in your yard or in the vineyard do not make choices as to where to grow or how to grow. Our relationship with Christ is possible because of Jesus choosing us while we were yet in sin and rebellion. But this analogy, as all analogies, has a weakness in fully explaining God giving human beings the ability to respond as no branch in the world can.

Look at the beginning of verse 4, "Remain in Me" clearly implies we have God given, free will to choose to remain. That brings us back to the promise I opened with: "I am the

vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit," John 15:5 (HCSB). Jesus tells us that our Heavenly Father is pleased and honored when we produce much fruit. "My Father is glorified by this, that you produce much fruit and prove to be My disciples," John 15:8 (HCSB). In the verse before, Jesus explains: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you," John 15:7 (KJV).

Jesus moves away from the analogy with the vine to explain more about His and the Father's motive in giving us what we ask for. "As the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you. Remain in My love," John 15:9 (HCSB). Then, Jesus explains to his disciples how to remain or abide in His love. "If you keep My commands you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commands and remain in His love," John 15:10 (HCSB). Note, Jesus

did not say we earn God's love or that He had earned God's love. Without living in right relationship with Christ, we cannot fully appreciate His love or, for that matter, even dependably recognize Godly Love when we see it. Outside of God's will which we know by remaining in His Word (the 66 books of the Christian Bible) we do not have the ability to know right from wrong and even recognize the strongest indications of God's love and blessings.

Now, Jesus tells the eleven, and us too, why He is saying all these things. "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you," John 15:11-12 (KJV). Those in that room that night were going to have an immediate great need for love from each other and from Christ. Jesus wants the disciples to understand or at least have the seed of truth to begin to understand.

"No one has greater love than this, that someone would lay down his life for his friends," John 15:13 (HCSB).

Hicks is a consultant in the Discipleship and Family Ministry Department, Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, and a member of Brandon Church, Brandon.



Explore the Bible
with Don Hicks

An Identity You Must Embrace • Romans 6:8-18

When a witness of a crime enters the witness protection program, they receive a new identity. Many of them reluctantly embrace this new identity because it requires putting off the old one and assuming a new, unfamiliar one. Their well-being depends on changing their lifestyle to embrace their new identity. If they do not follow the ground rules of their new identity, they may end up in danger.

Paul wanted the church at Rome to understand that they had a new identity in Christ. He wrote in Romans 6:6-7: We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. (NLT)

We are called to reckon ourselves dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. The word, reckon, is not used as we Southerners sometimes use it to imply, "I guess so." It means to put to one's account, to believe that what God says about us as believers is true. Sometimes we don't feel like a new creature in Christ Jesus nor do we feel like we're dead to sin and alive unto righteousness. But, since when have our unreliable feelings been an indicator of the truth? Never!

God's Word is Truth and it is alive and full of power and able to change us.

Paul told the Romans not to let sin reign in their mortal bodies to obey its lusts. Wiersbe says that the literal translation of this is, "Do not constantly allow sin to reign in your mortal body so that you are constantly obeying its lusts." The person who is not a believer cannot stop sinning and live righteously, but we as believers can,

because the power of Christ dwells in us.

We are to be careful not to yield the members of our bodies as instruments to sin because sin is no longer our master. Adrian Rogers once said, "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay." When we yield our members to sin, they become weapons for evil, yet when we yield them to God in righteous-

ness, they are weapons for good. Consider the life of David how he used his hands that were yielded to God to wield the sling-shot that gave Goliath his final blow, but later he used his eyes as instruments of evil when he looked upon Bathsheba with lust. God wants all of our members yielded to Him, put at His disposal.

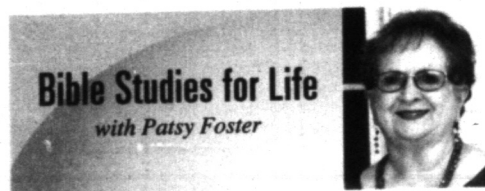
Thank God, we are able to yield our members to God in righteousness because of the wonderful grace of God that gives us freedom and the power to resist the temptation of sin.

We are no longer under sin's despicable dominion. Paul warns that a lifestyle of habitual sin is not compatible with one whose life is changed by grace. The enemy of our soul may draw us offside and cause us to stumble and fall, but we as blood bought believers should never stay down in sin,

but should arise and return to our gracious and merciful Heavenly Father who lovingly awaits our return.

Whomever we choose to obey, his servant we are. If we obey the lusts of our flesh and choose a lifestyle of sin, it is our master, and it leads to death. The church at Rome chose to obey God unto righteousness and to obey the form of doctrine that was delivered to them. Paul rejoiced to see them embrace their new identity and learn to serve the Lord in righteousness and true holiness. Years later from a prison cell in Rome, Paul wrote a similar message to the Ephesians, one much needed in America today: Throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature created to be like God—truly righteous and holy. (Ephesians 4:22-24 NLT) One can only imagine what the Church would become if we as believers wholeheartedly embraced our new identity and yielded all our members in service to God.

Foster is a member of Murphy Creek Church, Louisville.



Bible Studies for Life
with Patsy Foster

CLEANUP

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from Webster Association in Eupora and Gulf Coast Association in Gulfport," Didlake said. "The Oklahoma volunteers are from Calhoun Association in

Calhoun City, Yalobusha Association in Coffeeville, and Colonial Hills Church in Southaven."

The volunteers are tackling chainsaw work and preparing heavy debris for removal to pick up points. The Dallas volunteers have encountered about 200 jobs, or requests for assistance,

while the Oklahoma volunteers will probably be involved in "200-plus" jobs, Didlake said.

"The task force's boom truck is also in Texas, because there are so many hanging limbs presenting a hazard to anyone trying to work underneath," he added.

All Mississippi Baptist volunteers are expected to return home by the end of this week, Didlake said.

The Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief Task Force is supported by gifts to the Mississippi Cooperative Program, the Margaret Lackey State Mission

Offering, and disaster relief donations. For more information, contact the MBCB Men's Ministry Department at P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone: (601) 292-3334 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 334. E-mail: cwright@mbcb.org.



WORLD TRAVELER — Flat Lottie, a four-foot, three-inch cutout of the famed Southern Baptist missionary, stops by India's Taj Mahal as part of her missions travels with International Mission Board writers, photographers, and videographers. (IMB photo)

'Flat Lottie' tours world to promote missions, offering

SOUTHEAST ASIA (BP) — Ever heard of Flat Stanley?

With Flat Stanley, schoolchildren exchange paper cutouts or digital images of Stanley as a way of interacting with students in other locations, even other countries. Likewise, Flat Lottie, akin to missionary pioneer Lottie Moon 100-plus years ago in China, is intent on stirring Southern Baptists to the fullest of missions support through their prayers, finances, and involvement.

Flat Lottie, as a 4-foot/3-inch poster — the same height as the real-life Lottie Moon — has accompanied International Mission Board (IMB) writers, photographers, and videographers across Asia as they've reported on the work of Southern Baptist missionaries in 2013 and 2012.

Flat Lottie also has been transported to various missions settings as a caricature via computer graphics and as a hand-held paper cutout.

To see Flat Lottie's travels in 2013 via an interactive map, click <http://www.commissionstories.com/asia/>. Each pin in the map connects to a brief story about the missionary or missions outreach there.

"Wondering what your mission dollars have done this year?" one of the IMB/Asia writers noted in describing the purpose of Flat Lottie's travels to communicate to Southern Baptists. "Flat Lottie Moon set out across Asia to find out how every dollar given to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering makes a difference. She visited your representatives who were hard at work sharing the Gospel and helping communities."

Flat Lottie also has been seen

in a video featuring two young missions enthusiasts who tell about the famed missionary's labors in China preceding her death in 1912 (<http://vimeo.com/69088496>).

The offering, officially known as the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions, is a key channel of support for nearly 5,000 IMB missionaries worldwide. It is an annual emphasis across the Southern Baptist Convention each December, working in tandem with gifts from churches through the Cooperative Program year-round for Southern Baptist Convention missions.

"Our multimedia teams see your mission offering dollars at work in every story we do," IMB personnel in Asia wrote on their AsiaStories website last year in describing their initial Flat Lottie project.

"It's a humbling experience to see how small and large gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering combine to make it possible to reach a lost world. This year [2012], the AsiaStories staff wanted to make a better visual connection between our stories and your mission dollars... and while we were at it, we had a little fun."

Each media team, while traveling to gather missions stories, "took a life-sized poster of Lottie Moon, the woman our missions offering is named after, with the goal of showing 'Lottie @ Work' in places and doing ministries you'd never expect."

"You should have seen the crazy looks thrown our way when we pulled out a 4-foot 3-inch poster of a missionary from the early 1900s. Of course we got a lot of smiles and laugh-

ter when we asked people to pose with our Flat Lottie. But to our surprise, this poster (sitting in a dugout canoe, scuba diving or digging a well) provided an opening to share about this legacy missionary and the message she carried so many years ago."

Resources posted in tandem with the Flat Lottie initiative include:

- a Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/flatlottie?ref=stream>).

- a multi-dimensional Pinterest page (<http://www.pinterest.com/asiastories/lottie-moon/>).

- 10 things that happen because of gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (<http://www.commissionstories.com/asia/stories/view/10-things-that-happen-because-you-give-to-lottie-moon-christmas-offering>).

- 7 ideas for boosting a church's Lottie Moon Offering (<http://www.commissionstories.com/asia/stories/view/7-ideas-for-boosting-your-churchs-lottie-moon-christmas-offering>).

Other suggestions include finding stories on missionaries to share at Lottie@Work or on unreached people groups.org.

Also see the Lottie Moon Offering idea gallery (<http://www.imb.org/main/lottie-moon/ideagallerydetails.asp?StoryID=11867&LanguageID=1709>) for various ways other churches have rallied to support Southern Baptists' missionaries, and a webpage with examples of how Southern Baptists' gifts are utilized on the mission field (<http://www.imb.org/main/lottie-moon/lmcoatwork.asp?PageNavID=111>).

Slain Benghazi teacher remembered as man on a mission for God

AUSTIN, Texas (BP) — Ronnie Smith and his family moved to Benghazi, Libya, 18 months ago so he could teach chemistry at the International School Benghazi, sensing God's call to be a light in a war-weary land.

On Dec. 5 while jogging, Smith was shot multiple times by perpetrators yet to be captured or claim responsibility for the attack.

Friends, students, and fellow teachers in Libya and the U.S. were stunned by the sudden loss. Some despaired at the apparent meaninglessness of the murder while others voiced hope in God's providence.

Ahmed @Criminimed posted on Twitter following the shooting: "He left his wife, his son and his country to come to Libya and help our kids get better education and we rewarded him with [sic] bullet."

The Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, Texas, where Smith was a staffer before going to Libya, in a prepared statement noted: "Although we grieve because we have lost a friend, a husband, and a father, we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God has a greater purpose than we can imagine right now."

The church held a private memorial service for Smith on Dec. 9. Smith served as an associate pastor at Austin Stone for four years prior to the family's move to Libya.

Smith was alone in Benghazi, having sent Anita and their young son Hosea back to the U.S. Nov. 12 to begin the Christmas break. Smith was scheduled to leave Dec. 13 after his students completed semester exams.

Principal Peter Hodge, describing Smith as a beloved teacher and friend of the International School Benghazi (ISB), wrote on the ISB website that Smith "supported students in their learning and always had time to help when asked. He was a professional who gave his time freely and without question. We cannot begin to comprehend why this has happened and it is extremely difficult for his students and his colleagues to accept."

Libya's violence left the stu-

dents "in a state of depression" but Smith was "like a light," wrote Dave Barrett, Austin Stone Church executive pastor of operations, in an email response to questions from the Southern Baptist TEXAN, news-journal of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.

Smith's death focuses attention once again on a region torn by sectarian violence. Four Americans, including the U.S. ambassador to Libya, Chris Stephens, were killed in a September 2012 terrorist attack on the U.S. consulate roughly six kilometers from ISB.

Smith reportedly was jogging near the compound when his assailants shot him and drove away.

On Nov. 8, Smith had written on Twitter: "Bed time. Cue the bombs," referring to the all-too-common sounds of violence. Three days earlier, an unexploded bomb was removed from the Benghazi Medical Center six miles from the school. On Nov. 11, an anti-tank mine was defused in a popular shopping district.

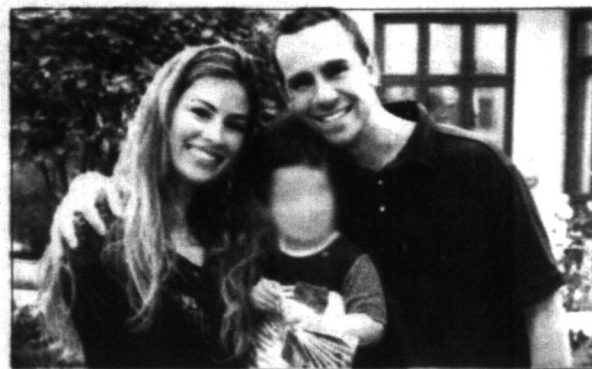
On Nov. 2 when the Rotana Café, popular with women and their children, was blown up, Smith tweeted: "Wanna blow up something harmful? How about those cafes and sheeshas [hookah] spots where men spend all night neglecting their kids and wives."

So why would a young father and husband move his family to such a place? Barrett sent The TEXAN a link to Smith's video response. He had obviously given the question plenty of consideration before leaving.

"If there is any single person in the entire universe that you can take a chance on, it's God," Smith said in the video.

Yielding to God's call to go to unfamiliar and potentially dangerous places goes hand-in-hand with a commitment to follow Christ, several Austin pastors told the TEXAN. Though they did not know him, they said his faith was evident in his obedience and his death a cause for reflection.

"God may be calling us to go some places — not places we'd pick to live," said Rod Minor, pastor of Anderson Mills Church in Austin.



RONNIE SMITH, WIFE ANITA, AND SON HOSEA

END